



**AT SCHOOL TOGETHER**  
NEXT STEPS FOR ROMA EDUCATION  
IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

# A BRIEF HISTORY AND TIMELINE

**IN NOVEMBER, 2007**, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Roma students were being subject to discriminatory treatment in the Czech educational system.

The complaint was brought by a group of 18 Roma teenagers from the town of Ostrava, who as young children had been directed into “special” primary schools for children with mild mental disabilities. In the case, *D.H. and others v. Czech Republic*, the court found Roma were disproportionately represented in these schools, which offered only a limited curriculum that constrained future educational and career opportunities.

The **Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe** is responsible for working with member states to ensure the implementation of decisions of the ECHR. The committee has repeatedly identified shortcomings in the Czech Republic’s policy response to the *D.H.* ruling, issuing ten decisions on the case since 2010. Other groups also continue to press the government to deliver change, including local Roma parent organizations, national and international human rights NGOs, the European Commission, and the Czech Republic’s Public Defender of Rights.

**All agree: ten years after the *D.H.* ruling, Czech Roma still face institutional discrimination and segregation at school.**

*(Timeline continued on other side)*

## 2007-2011: FALSE START

### APRIL 2009

In its initial response to the DH ruling, the government outlines a National Action Plan on Inclusive Education (the NAPIV). The goal of the NAPIV was to end the persisting practice of segregating Roma pupils. The Committee of Ministers finds the initial proposals inadequate.

### MARCH 2010

A backlash against the DH ruling among teachers working with special-needs children leads to the formation of the Association of Special Pedagogues (ASP).

### JULY 2010

After the election of a center-right led coalition, the government pulls back on educational reforms proposed in the NAPIV, and cuts staff at the Ministry of Education. The ministry of education official responsible for equality issues, Viktor Hartos, resigns in October, saying “no genuine effort is being made to contribute toward resolving this serious problem that affects society as a whole; rather, there is a tendency to be satisfied with mere formalities.”

## 2012-2014: BEGINNING AGAIN

### JUNE 2012

Amid confusion over the status of the NAPIV, which was widely criticized for its lack of impact, the Committee of Ministers invites the Czech authorities to produce a new Action plan. The Czech authorities then submits a new consolidated action plan titled “Equal Opportunities”. Its target indicator was “a gradual falling trend in the number of Roma pupils in special schools or classes until the achievement of a proportion that corresponds to the number of Roma pupils in the population as a whole.”

### SEPTEMBER 2012

The Public Defender of Rights releases the first national data on the Ethnic Composition of Pupils of Former Special Schools. The survey estimates that at least 32% of the pupils were Roma, with the percentage as high as 47% in one region.

Subsequently, the Schools Inspectorate begins collecting ethnic data, giving it for the first time accurate numbers of Roma-identified children in the school system. The collection of ethnic data was vigorously opposed by the ASP and its allies.

### SEPTEMBER 2013

New diagnostic tests for assessing “mild mental disability” are put into practice, with the stated objective of ending discriminatory bias.

## 2015-17 ANOTHER NEW BEGINNING

### APRIL 2015

A report from Amnesty International, *Must try harder: Ethnic discrimination against Romani Children in Czech schools*, documents continued segregation of Czech Roma school children.

### SEPTEMBER 2016

A new Education Act, approved by parliament in 2015, comes into force. The new act marks an important step towards the goal of inclusive education, by establishing the principle that pupils with special educational needs should be provided with adequate support in mainstream schools. The government also implemented a series of measures aimed at securing funding for the additional teaching staff required in mainstream schools

The most recent statistical data for the school year 2016/2017 show that Roma pupils are still disproportionately educated as children with mild mental disabilities (making up 30.6% of those so diagnosed for the 2015/2016 school year and 30.9% for the 2016/2017 school year).

#### **JUNE 2011**

A group of sixty teachers, psychologists, doctors and other experts advising on educational reform all resigned, saying that the government lacked the political will to pursue an inclusive education agenda.

#### **SEPTEMBER 2011**

The government announces and then backtracks on its plans to close practical/special schools, after thousands sign petitions organized by the ASP opposing the idea.

#### **JUNE 2014**

The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers raises questions about the effectiveness of the testing system.

#### **SEPTEMBER 2014**

European Commission Infringement Proceedings are launched against the Czech Republic on the grounds that its treatment of Roma students violates European Union law. The proceedings focus on Article 21 (1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which prohibits discrimination based on any ground such as race or ethnic origin; and the Race Equality Directive, which prohibits discrimination in access to education on the grounds of race or ethnicity.

#### **AUGUST 2017**

The Czech ombudsman expresses concern in the 2016 national human rights report that de facto segregation of Roma pupils is continuing, despite the move to provide support services to pupils with special needs in mainstream settings under the 2015 Education Act.